DECORATION.—HOUSE PAINTING.

THE *Athenæum* is following up this subject to which we called attention in a former number. The last paper for December 19, embraces three points or heads.—1. "*Shall the colour chosen be used in tones dark or light—full or faint?*" (the influence of aspect being determined on by the rules set forth in a previous paper)—2. "*Where colour shall be lightest—where darkest*"—and 3. "*Decoration of ceilings.*"

There is much of the usual skill and acumen of the writings of that journal in this article; the influence of full-toned or faint colours, according as the apartment in which they may be used is light or dark, is first commented on, and then as to the choice of colours. White, yellow, red, and purple, are primarily discussed, and in a most amusing and practical manner. The amusement, too, is of a philosophical cast, derived from the introduction of Goethe as an authority, whose "Theory of Colours" has been rendered accessible to us by Mr. Eastlake's edition. A second-hand extract may serve to give our readers an antitaste of the pleasure they may derive both from the perusal of the article in the *Athenæum* and the original work, but we must confine ourselves to one colour:—

Yellow, says Goethe, is the colour nearest light. In its highest purity it always carries with it the nature of brightness, and has a serene, gay, softly exciting character. In this state, applied to dress, hangings, carpeting, &c. it is agreeable. "Gold, in its perfectly unmixed state, especially when the effect of polish is superadded, gives us a new and high idea of this colour; in like manner, a strong yellow, as it appears on satin, has a magnificent and noble effect. We find from experience, again, that yellow excites a warm and agreeable impression. Hence, in painting, it belongs to the illumined and emphatic side. This impression of warmth may be experienced in a very lively manner if we look at a landscape through a yellow glass, particularly on a grey winter's day. The eye is gladdened, the heart expanded and cheered; a glow seems at once to breathe towards us." The following assertion appears to us rather too broad in its application. There are surely circumstances, when the yellowish brown of the fallen leaf, as it is termed, might be most judiciously employed; but Goethe's account is rather more poetical than practical. He says, "When a yellow colour is communicated to dull and coarse surfaces, such as common cloth, felt, or the like, on which it does not appear with full energy, the disagreeable effect is apparent. By a slight and scarcely perceptible change, the beautiful impression of fire and gold is transformed into one not undeserving the epithet of foul, and the colour of harmony and joy reversed to that of ignominy and aversion. To this impression the yellow hats of bankrupts, and the yellow circles on the mantles of Jews, may have owed their origin. As no colour can be considered as stationary, so we can very easily augment yellow into reddish, by condensing or darkening it. The colour increases in energy, and appears in red-yellow more powerful and splendid. All that we have said of yellow is applicable here in a higher degree. The red-yellow gives an impression of warmth and gladness, since it represents the hue of the intenser glow of fire, and of the milder radiance of the setting sun. Hence it is agreeable around us; and again, as clothing in greater or less degrees is cheerful and magnificent. A slight tendency to red immediately gives a new character to yellow, and while the English and Germans content themselves with pale yellow colours in leather, the French, as Castel has remarked, prefer a yellow enhanced to red; indeed, in general, every thing in colour is agreeable which belongs to the active side. As pure yellow passes very easily to red-yellow, so the deepening of this last to yellow-red is not to be arrested. The agreeable cheerful sensation which red-yellow excites, increases to an intolerably powerful impression in bright yellow-red. The active side is here in its highest energy, and it is not to be wondered at that impetuous, robust, uneducated men should be especially pleased with this colour. Among savage nations the inclination for it has been universally remarked, and when children, left to themselves, begin to use tints, they never spare vermilion and minium. In looking steadfastly at a perfect yellow-red surface, the colour seems actually to penetrate the organ. It produces an extreme excitement, and still acts thus when somewhat darkened. A yellowred cloth disturbs and enrages animals. I have known men of education to whom its effect was intolerable if they chanced to see a person dressed in a scarlet cloak on a grey, cloudy day."

And so with this kind of mystical analysis does Goethe pursue his subject, leading us into a region of subtleties, or at any rate far away from that stolid matter-of-fact perception which an English house-painter and his employers would hold to as the ground of choice. The reading of this paper, however, will disturb much of that mechanical action and structure of thought which prevails among us. It will tell that there is a theory of colour and laws of application, and something certain and determinable, far different indeed from that unenviable dulness of soul and principle by which art, in all its ramifications, has been smothered in this country. But we must not detain from the reading of that which excites to our remarks, and to whet the appetite the more, we quote a conclusive paragraph on decoration of ceilings:—

"We are convinced, from actual experiments, that very effective and cheap decorations might be used in ceilings. The colouring of mouldings and cornices by the hand, and indeed all hand labour on a small scale, is slow, and therefore costly, but the plan we would recommend, and hope to see extensively used for the adornment of ceilings, is much more simple and easy of performance. Ceilings may be treated as easily as walls. Papers may be prepared expressly with suitable patterns, and they may be attached, afterwards, to the walls like common paper-hangings. After making some little allowance for the extra trouble in affixing the paper to the ceiling, there seems to be no reason why the ornamental papering of ceilings should be more costly than that employed on the walls. In one experiment, we directed a paper surface of about ten feet in diameter to be prepared, which contained Pompeian forms expressed in four colours, and which cost, in its preparation, about forty shillings. Had the same design been executed in great numbers, there is no doubt that it might have been produced for half the money, or even less. On the other hand, had the design been painted on the ceiling itself, by the hand, the cost would have been much increased. The economy of the process of affixing the ornament in a large surface at once to the ceiling, is obtained precisely on the same principle as that of laying the tesserm in blocks on pavements, according to Mr. Singer's patent, instead of laying tesseræ one by one on the floor.

"Leaving out of the account the additional beauty which tasteful colouring on the ceiling confers on a room, we would recommend the practice as economical—a charm oftentimes more attractive in these money-making times than beauty itself. In the course of every three or four years, the ceiling of a London house requires re-colouring. There is little doubt that the determined hues of the positive colouring in an ornamental design, and also the paper itself, would tend very much to conceal the ordinary cracks and markings in the ceiling, caused by the dirt and smoke, and thus reduce the necessity of re-colouring. In addition to the experiment already mentioned, we had a simpler one prepared in two shades of deep straw-colour, for the centre of a room, the cost of which experiment was only five shillings. In the prosecution of these experiments, it is only just to mention that we had the assistance of Mr. Clarke, a paper-stainer, of 60, High Holborn, who seemed well disposed to carry them much farther, if any public taste could be generated for them. In the preparation of decorations for ceilings, and until we can enter upon the subject of pattern in detail, a word of caution may be whispered against all and every sort of imitation of raised surfaces. Let there be no sham cornices or rosettes for centres—no sham festoons, draperies, or tassels. Whatever is done, should be limited to the expression of agreeable forms in colour, and much more effect may be produced under this limitation than is generally obtained by the plaster mouldings and ornaments themselves which are commonly attached to ceilings. The choice of the colours and peculiar treatment of them in ceilings must, of course, be regulated by the circumstances of the room, and the character of the decorations used in it."

REMARKS BY PROFESSOR TRAIL

ON THE INTRODUCTION INTO SCOTLAND OF GRANITE FOR ORNAMENTAL PURPOSES,

By Messrs. M'Donald and Leslie of Aberdeen.

THE first idea of employing the refractory but enduring material, granite, in sculpture, appears to be due to the ancient Egyptians. Those who have enjoyed opportunities of examining their colossal buildings have acknowledged the precision and even delicacy of the figures and ornaments with which that ingenious people contrived to enrich their architecture. Specimens of their sculpture in granite, which have, for three thousand years, resisted the action of the elements, and the yet more destructive influence of barbarous invaders, still astonish us by the high polish of their surfaces, and the delicate finish of their details. Even a visit to the Egyptian Saloon of the British Museum will prove that, in accuracy of muscular delineation and in the communication of absolute *fleshiness* to the lips and features of some of the figures there preserved, the ancient Egyptians evinced a high perfection in the art of sculpture, in a material of the most imperishable kind on which few succeeding artists have ventured to employ the chisel.

In our own times, the fabrication of slabs, pedestals, and vases, in hard porphyries and in granite, has been carried to great perfection in Sweden. The quarries of Blyberg, at Elfdalen, for many years have furnished materials for Swedish ingenuity and skill. The elegant forms and high finish of their works in these refractory materials have contributed greatly to the splendour of the Swedish capital, and are known and admired over Europe. Yet, though our own mountains yield no less beautiful and durable materials, it is surprising how long we have remained without any attempt to apply them to the purposes of ornamental art. It is true * * * that Aberdeen exhibits a city chiefly built of blocks of hewn granite; * * * but the idea of giving a polish, equal to that of ancient Egypt, to our granite in works of considerable size—of introducing this splendid material as a domestic ornament in our halls and saloons, and as lasting memorials of departed worth in our cemeteries—is undoubtedly due to two citizens of Aberdeen, Messrs. M'Donald and Leslie, who carry on extensive works in that town, where the grey granite of Aberdeen, and the rich red granite of Peterhead, are cut into an endless variety of ornamental articles, which receive the highest polish.

A late visit to their establishment convinced me that these gentlemen have reduced to practice the difficult problem of giving any required form to so stubborn a material as granite, and of communicating to its surface an exquisite polish, which shew it to be well suited for the abodes of rank and opulence. The rich warm tint of the Peterhead granite, in particular, will harmonize better with the gilded ornaments and gorgeous hangings of a modern gallery or superb saloon, either as tables or as pedestals for works of art, than furniture made of the most costly woods, or even than the snowy marble of Carrara.

For monumental work, this enduring material possesses advantages over the best marble. In our climate, the effects of rain, sudden frosts, and succeeding thaws, are soon perceptible on Carrara marble, or any other kind exposed freely to the weather. Marble thus soon loses its glossy surface; it contracts greenish stains from the vegetation of minute *lepus*; and inscriptions in a few years, from these causes, become illegible. The polished granite of Aberdeenshire retains its polish most perfectly under all atmospheric changes; does not contract any stain from vegetation; and unless wantonly mutilated, will transmit the inscription engraven on it to distant ages. * *

The extent and perfection to which these gentlemen have carried the working of this very refractory but beautiful stone, may be considered as forming an era in British art; and require only to be more generally known, to be appreciated and encouraged by public taste and munificence.

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